



State of Wisconsin
Department of Public Instruction
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GUEST EDITORIAL

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Education is a building block for hope and our future

By Wisconsin State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster

We have long held the belief that the days of our children will be better than our own. As we look back at the recent election and anticipate the change that is coming, we must ensure that the education our children receive in our public schools provides them hope for the future and the opportunity to succeed.

Federal education law, commonly known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), will undergo Congressional reauthorization in the near future. Parents, educators, and the public are committed to the intent of NCLB, but are distracted by its complexity, inflexibility, burdensome requirements, and lack of opportunities for innovation. The law's over-reliance on standardized testing to measure academic achievement is a disservice to what we know about student learning and modern accountability.

As the educational landscape changes with NCLB reauthorization, we have a moral obligation to keep the good of all our children at the heart of those changes. We must ensure that our students have the academic foundation and skills to think critically, make decisions, work cooperatively, analyze data, synthesize information, and solve complex problems.

We must demand accountability in our schools and encourage innovation. We should use and share best practices, either in traditional school settings or through charter schools, career academies, or other promising models. We must invest in our public schools, particularly in the arts and the science, engineering, technology, and mathematics (STEM) fields that propel economic growth and human advancement. We also must train, retain, and support our teachers, and attract additional qualified individuals into teaching careers, especially at high needs schools.

We approach 2009 with hope and expectations for positive change for our nation. Public education has been and must continue to be the foundation of our American democracy. Our federal education laws must be a guide for high standards and allow states and local school districts to move

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beyond “no child left behind,” to every child a graduate with the knowledge and skills needed for the global economy of the 21st century. The next Congress and administration can strengthen public education by moving away from overly prescriptive compliance and move toward a more collaborative approach that promotes community-based innovation and accountability for America’s diverse PK-12 educational system. The vitality of our nation depends on developing creativity and entrepreneurship in our public schools as parents and educators build our future, one child at a time.

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Elizabeth Burmaster is the elected state superintendent of public instruction in Wisconsin and former president of the national Council of Chief State School Officers. She will attend the CCSSO’s Presidential Transition Task Force meeting Dec. 1 in Washington, D.C. Burmaster has conducted input sessions throughout Wisconsin on needed changes to NCLB and has testified before Congress and the Wisconsin Legislature on this issue.

NOTES: A high-resolution photo of the state superintendent is available on the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction “Media Contacts and Resources” webpage at <http://dpi.wi.gov/eis/vm-media.html>. This editorial is available electronically at http://dpi.wi.gov/eis/pdf/dpi2008_174.pdf.